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Trinidad & Tobago

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs

April 1989

Official Name:
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

PROFILE

Geography

Area: 5,128 sq. km. (1,980 sq. mi.); about 1½ times the size of Rhode Island. **Cities:** *Capital*—Port-of-Spain (metropolitan pop. 300,000). *Other city*—San Fernando (50,000). **Terrain:** Plains and low mountains. **Climate:** Tropical; rainy season (June to December).

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Trinidadian(s) and Tobagonian(s). **Population** (1988): 1,279,920. **Annual growth rate** (1988): 2.24%. **Ethnic groups** (1988): African 43%, East Indian 40%, mixed 14%, European 1%, Chinese 1%, others 1%. **Religions:** Roman Catholic 32.9%, Hindu 25.0%, Anglican 14.7%, other Christian 14.3%, Muslim 5.9%, others or none 7.2%. **Language:** English. **Education:** *Years compulsory*—8. *Literacy* (1988)—97%. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate* (1984)—20/1,000. *Life expectancy*—males 67 yrs., females 72 yrs. **Work force** (463,900 in 1988): *Construction and utilities*—18.1%. *Manufacturing, mining, quarrying*—14.8%. *Services*—47.9%.

Government

Type: Parliamentary democracy. **Independence:** August 31, 1962. **Present constitution:** Aug. 31, 1976.

Branches: *Executive*—president (chief of state), prime minister (head of government), cabinet. *Legislative*—bicameral parliament. *Judicial*—independent court system; highest court of appeal is Privy Council in London.

Subdivisions: 7 counties, 4 municipalities (Trinidad), Tobago House of Assembly (Tobago).

Political parties: National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), People's National Movement (PNM), National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), People's Popular Movement (PPM). **Suffrage:** Universal over 18.

Central government budget (1986 est.): *Revenues*—$1.46 billion. *Current expenditures*—$1.78 billion.

Defense: Less than 1% of central government budget.

Flag: On a red field, a black diagonal band edged with white.

Economy

GDP (1987): $4.5 billion. **Annual growth rate** (1985–86, constant prices): −6.4%. **Per capita income** (1987): $3,731. **Avg. inflation rate** (1987): 11%.

Natural resources: Oil and natural gas, 22% of GDP.

Agriculture: *Products*—poultry, fish, meat production, sugar, cocoa, 5% of GDP.

Industry: *Types*—manufacturing: processed food and beverages, fertilizers, assembly operations, 8% of GDP.

Trade (1986): *Exports*—$1.4 billion: crude oil, petroleum products, ammonia, fertilizers, methanol, iron/steel, sugar. *Major markets*—US, CARICOM, Italy, UK, Venezuela. *Imports* (1986)—$1.3 billion: industrial machinery, electrical machinery, vehicle kits, paper products, meat, dairy, wood products, rice. *Major suppliers*—US, UK, Japan, Canada, CARICOM.

Official exchange rate (Jan. 1989): TT$4.25 = US$1.

Membership in International Organizations

UN and most of its specialized agencies, CARICOM, Commonwealth, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Organization of American States (OAS), Nonaligned Movement, INTELSAT.

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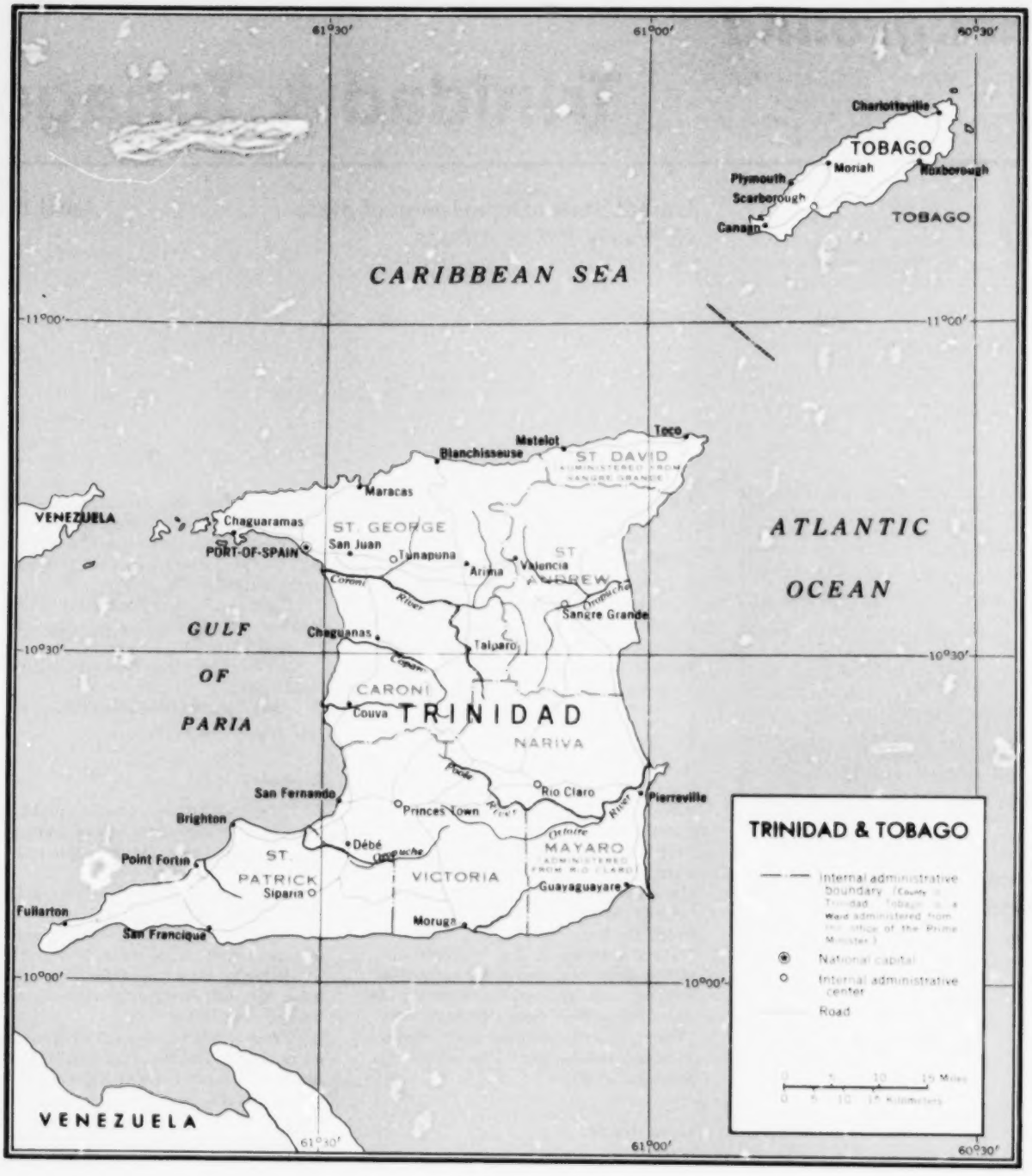
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ST. GEORGE
ST. DAVID
ADMINISTERED FROM SANGRE GRANDE
ST. ANDREW
MAYARO
ADMINISTERED FROM RIO CLARO
VICTORIA
ST. PATRICK
Matelot
Toco
Blanchisseuse
Maracas
Chaguaramas
PORT-OF-SPAIN
San Juan
Tunapuna
Arima
Valencia
Sangre Grande
Chaguanas
Talparo
Couva
Rio Claro
Pierreville
Princes Town
San Fernando
Brighton
Point Fortin
Débé
Siparia
Guayaguayare
Fullarton
San Francique
Morugo
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
Internal administrative boundary (County of Trinidad and Tobago is a ward administered from the office of the Prime Minister.)
National capital
Internal administrative center
Road
0 5 10 15 Miles
0 5 10 15 Kilometers

GEOGRAPHY

Trinidad and Tobago are the southernmost islands of the Lesser Antilles chain in the Caribbean. Trinidad, the largest island of the chain, has an area of 4,830 square kilometers (1,864 sq. mi.). It is separated from Venezuela by the 11-kilometer-wide (7-mi.) strait of the Gulf of Paria. Geologically, it is an extension of the South American Continent.

Three relatively low mountain ranges cross Trinidad from east to west. Their highest elevation reaches 940 meters (3,085 ft.) in the heavily forested Northern Range. Between the Northern and Central Ranges the land is flat and well watered; between the Central and Southern Ranges it is rolling, and the water supply often falls short in the dry season. Tropical forests cover half of the island. Swamps are found along part of the east and west coasts. The island's low latitude places it outside the usual path of hurricanes. The climate is tropical but pleasant; average maximum temperature is 33°C (92°F).

Port-of-Spain, the principal commercial center in the eastern Caribbean, is located on the major sea- and air-lanes between South America and the United States and Europe. San Fernando, Trinidad's second largest city, is located on the southwestern coast and is a center for the petroleum and petrochemical industries. Pitch Lake, also on Trinidad's southwestern coast, is the world's largest natural asphalt bog and measures 40 hectares (100 acres). It was used in past centuries for caulking the sailing ships of Sir Francis Drake and other explorers.

Tobago lies 30 kilometers (19 mi.) northeast of Trinidad and has an area of 300 square kilomaters (116 sq. mi.). Known as the "Robinson Crusoe Island," it has long stretches of scenic and almost deserted beaches, appearing today much as it might have to the first Europeans. A ridge of volcanic origin lies along the center of the island, forming its backbone and reaching a maximum height of 549 meters (1,800 ft.). Tobago has slightly lower temperatures than Trinidad due to more constant exposure to the trade winds. Small-scale farming and tourism are the principal sources of livelihood. Scarborough is the major town. The island has excellent resort hotels, beaches, lagoons, and undersea coral gardens with tropical fish.

Maracas Bay, located about 14 miles from downtown Port-of-Spain, is Trinidad's finest beach.

PEOPLE

Trinidad and Tobago's cosmopolitan society mainly comprises people of African or East Indian origin. Virtually all Trinidadians and Tobagonians speak English, ranging from standard British English to local variations. A small percentage also speak Hindi, French patois, and several other dialects, but use of these languages is dying out.

The two major folk traditions are the Creole—a mixture of African elements influenced by Spanish, French, and English culture—and the East Indian. The abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833, led to a serious disruption in Trinidad's agricultural economy as many liberated slaves left the estates where they had worked. Consequently, indentured agricultural laborers from India came to Trinidad in a wave of immigration that lasted from 1846 until 1915. At the end of their indenture, most of these immigrants decided to remain. The East Indians still dominate the country's agriculture, although with increased urbanization many have moved to the cities and become prominent in business and the professions. Both folk cultures still show the influence of the British colonial period.

Sports and festivals are notable elements of the islands' culture. Cricket and soccer are the primary national sports; basketball, track-and-field events, and horseracing are popular.

Hindu festival, "Hosay."

Carnival, the national festival, absorbs contributions from various ethnic groups. The elaborate costumes are secretly designed.

Trinidadians and Tobagonians celebrate enthusiastically during Carnival, held on the Monday and Tuesday before the beginning of Lent. The annual festival is marked by parades with marchers in fantastic costumes, calypso songs and dancing, and steel bands. Its character is predominantly Creole, but the East Indian population also participates. Calypso music and steel bands have become a world-famous musical form distinctive of the island culture.

HISTORY

Trinidad was discovered by Columbus in 1498 on his third voyage to the Western Hemisphere. At that time, Trinidad was inhabited by several Arawak Indian tribes, who later were destroyed by early European settlers. The Spanish made the first successful attempt to colonize Trinidad in 1592. Although it attracted French and other foreign settlers, Trinidad continued under Spanish rule until it was captured by the British in 1797. Trinidad was ceded formally to the United Kingdom in 1802.

Tobago probably has changed hands more often than any other West Indian island. Dutch, French, and English expeditions captured it from each other during its early colonial history, before it was finally ceded to the United Kingdom in 1814.

Trinidad and Tobago were merged in 1888 to form a single colony. In 1958, the United Kingdom established the autonomous Federation of the West Indies, comprising Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados, and the Leeward and Windward Islands. The capital of the federation was Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. Difficulties in working together, however, caused Jamaica to withdraw in 1961, and when Trinidad and Tobago followed, the federation collapsed. Trinidad and Tobago obtained full independence and joined the Commonwealth in 1962.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

In 1976, Trinidad and Tobago adopted a republican constitution under which the president, elected by the parliament, replaced the British monarch as chief of state. General direction and control of the government rests with the cabinet, which is led by the prime minister and is responsible to the bicameral parliament.

The 36 members of the House of Representatives are elected to 5-year terms, although elections may be called earlier by the president at the request of the prime minister or when the House of Representatives votes "no confidence" in the cabinet. The Senate's 31 members are appointed by the president, 16 on the advice of the prime minister, 6 with the advice of the leader of the opposition, and 9 independents chosen by the president from among outstanding members of the community.

The supreme judicial authority is the Court of Appeal, the chief justice of which is appointed by the president on the advice of the prime minister and the leader of the opposition. The final appellate court is the Privy Council in London. Trinidad's seven counties and four self-governing cities are administered by elected councils. Tobago was given a measure of internal self-government in 1980 and is ruled by the Tobago House of Assembly.

The first political party in Trinidad and Tobago with a continuing organization and program—the People's National Movement (PNM)—emerged in 1956 under Dr. Eric Williams, who was prime minister from independence until his death in March 1981. The PNM remained in power following the death of Dr. Williams by winning 26 of the 36 parliamentary seats contested in the November 1981 general election. However, the 30-year rule of the PNM ended 5 years later when the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) won a landslide victory in the general election of December 1986. The NAR formally was established in February 1986 when the membership of the Tobago-based Democratic Action Congress (DAC), led by A.N.R. Robinson; the United Labor Front (ULF), led by Basdeo Panday; the Tapia House Movement (THM), led by Dr. Lloyd Best; and the Organization for National Reconstruction (DNR), led by Karl Hudson-Phillips, agreed to merge into a united party.

In 1986, A.N.R. Robinson became the NAR's first political leader and, following the December 1986 general election, was named prime minister by

virtue of the party's 33 to 3 parliamentary majority. Robinson named a 13-member cabinet (including himself) in 1986, which was replaced in November 1987 by a 15-member cabinet. In August 1987, Dr. Lloyd Best formally withdrew the THM from the NAR. In addition to the PNM, two other parties, the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) and the People's Popular Movement (PPM), as well as several independent candidates, participated in the 1986 general election but won no seats. In September 1987, the NAR won 80 of the 125 seats contested during the local government elections in Trinidad, which are held every 3 years. The PNM retained the remaining 45 local government seats in Trinidad. The NAR also controls 11 of the 12 seats constituting the Tobago House of Assembly, where local government elections are held every 4 years. In local government elections held in November 1988, the NAR retained its control of 11 of the 12 seats constituting the Tobago House of Assembly.

Principal Government Officials

President—Noor M. Hassanali
Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economy—A.N.R. Robinson

Ministers
Attorney General and Legal Affairs—Selwyn Richardson
External Affairs and International Trade—Sahadeo Basdeo
National Security and Citizenship—Herbert Atwell
Industry, Enterprise and Tourism—Kenneth Gordon
Energy, Labor, Employment and Manpower Resources—Albert Richards

Ambassador to the United States and OAS—Angus Albert Khan
Ambassador to the United Nations—Majorie Thorpe

This neo-Renaissance building, called "Red House," was built in 1906 and serves as the center of government. It houses the parliamentary offices, House of Representatives, and Senate.

Aerial view of the oil refinery at Pointe-a-Pierre. Much of the island derives its income from crude oil production.

ECONOMY

Trinidad and Tobago's economy depends to a large degree on petroleum production for income. This sector has been dominant for more than 60 years and still accounts for some 22% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Since the oil boom began to fade in 1982, the diversification into petrochemicals—particularly ammonia and urea for fertilizer, and methanol—has played an increasingly important role.

The petroleum boom of 1974–82 was responsible for this two-island nation attaining the third highest per capita GDP in the Western Hemisphere after the United States and Canada in the early 1980s. However, inflation was very high during those years as a result of excess liquidity and the resultant high domestic consumption. Since the end of the oil boom in 1982, the economy has been in a recession. A one-third devaluation of the TT dollar was effected in late 1985 as a response to lower oil revenues and to help bring local production costs into a more competitive range.

In 1987, GDP fell for the fifth consecutive year. The rate of decline accelerated as a result of deteriorating performances of the nonoil and petroleum sectors.

The decline in the nonoil sector was principally in construction and quarrying, distribution, and finance and real

estate. However, there was a strong, widespread growth in the manufacturing sector, where value added grew by 5.2%. Oil production declined 4% in 1986 to an average 168,913 barrels per day and continued to decline in 1987.

Trinidad and Tobago sustained a deficit of $659 million on its balance of payments in 1986, a marked deterioration from the $106 million deficit in 1985. The outcome for 1986 reflected deterioration of both current and capital accounts. The current account moved from a deficit of less than $65 million in 1985 to a deficit of more than $532 million in 1986. This widening of the current account deficit resulted mainly from the poor performance in the merchandise trade account. At the same time, the capital account shifted from a surplus of $66 million in 1985 to a deficit of $40 million in 1986. The merchandise account was barely positive in 1986, but suffered from the precipitous drop in petroluem prices during the year.

Foreign exchange reserves at the end of 1986 were $335.6 million, down approximately 67% from the 1985 figure of $1 billion. Reserves are unlikely to rebuild as long as prices of oil, the primary revenue source, remain low. Increased investment in the nonoil sectors hopefully will lead to meaningful economic diversification in the future. The Trinidad and Tobago Government strongly promotes this trend, but significant results are not likely before 1990.

Trinidad and Tobago has increased efforts to promote the export of manufactured products and to take advantage of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) by developing new exports for the U.S. market. Recent investments include metal castings, plastics, and electronics assembly. (The devaluation of the currency from an exchange rate of TT $2.40 = US$1 to TT $3.60 = US$1 in December 1985 was intended, in part, to aid the export effort.) There also is keen interest in revitalizing several textile/apparel firms to take advantage of the "807 Program" export opportunities, whereby U.S. textiles are made into apparel and reexported to the United States.

Joint ventures are the preferred mechanism for foreign investment, although foreign holdings up to 100% foreign-held will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The government is interested in operations/investments that create a significant number of jobs, use local raw materials, and offer prospects for expansion, particularly in technology, in addition to those earning foreign exchange.

Caroni (1975) Ltd., the wholly owned government sugar company and largest landowner, has been charged with the diversification program of moving from sugar to food crops production. Expanded production in vegetables, rootcrops, beans, citrus, rice, fish, dairy, and beef are envisioned.

Trinidad and Tobago is a key member of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), along with Barbados and Jamaica. The intent of CARICOM is to have a free market of goods among the countries in the Caribbean (including Belize and Guyana). Measures implemented by member states to conserve foreign exchange have resulted in a substantial reduction in intraregional trade that peaked in 1981 and since has fallen at an average annual rate of 8%. Trinidad and Tobago—a major market for CARICOM goods during the oil boom—has reduced such imports in 1986. However, CARICOM's elimination of some stamp taxes increased imports in 1987.

The United States is Trinidad and Tobago's major trading partner. More than 60% of the country's exports are purchased by the United States ($833.2 million). The United States supplied more than 40% of the total value ($522.8) of goods imported into Trinidad and Tobago.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Trinidad and Tobago is a nonaligned democracy that maintains its most extensive relations with its Caribbean neighbors and major North American and European trading partners. As the wealthiest and most industrially developed country in the eastern Caribbean, it plays a major role in several regional organizations. In international forums, it prides itself on its independent voting record. Upon gaining independence in 1962, it joined the United Nations and the Commonwealth and in 1967 became the first Commonwealth member of the Organization of American States (OAS). It also is a member of the Nonaligned Movement and other international organizations.

DEFENSE

The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force consists of one regiment and a coast guard. The Trinidad and Tobago regiment, numbering about 2,000 troops, is composed of four infantry companies, a training company, and a reserve company. The coast guard performs search and rescue as well as antismuggling operations and coastal defense; it has about 600 personnel and 12 utility vessels. The coast guard also operates an air wing,

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

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with one fixed-wing aircraft. The Ministry of National Security, which has responsibility for the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, has four helicopters.

Travel Notes

Climate and clothing: Summerweight clothing is worn year round. The dry season usually lasts from January to May.

Customs: Passports and visas are not required for US visitors who plan to stay up to 2 months; proof of US citizenship, photo ID, and onward/return ticket are required.

Health: Wash fruits and vegetables carefully and do not drink water from an unknown source. Tapwater is potable, however.

Telecommunications: Telephone, telefax, and cable services are reliable, of high quality, and readily available. The state-owned telephone system was modernized in the early 1980s, and international direct-dial service is available to most subscribers. There are two radio stations (state-owned National Broadcasting Service, and privately owned Radio Trinidad) and one state-owned television station with two channels (Trinidad and Tobago Television).

Trinidad and Tobago is on Atlantic standard time and therefore 1 hour ahead of Washington from October to April and on the same time as Washington from April to October.

Transportation: Trinidad's Piarco International Airport is served by several airlines, including three US carriers. Air and coastal steamer connections to Tobago are available from Trinidad. Taxis and rental cars are available on both islands.

The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force's primary mission is to protect the Islands of Trinidad and Tobago from foreign aggression and to help local police forces maintain law and order and protect internal security.

RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

Trinidad and Tobago and the United States enjoy cordial relations. A U.S. Embassy was established at Port-of-Spain in 1962, replacing the former consulate general. The U.S. naval base at Chaguaramas, provided by the United Kingdom under the 1941 Leased Bases Agreement, was turned over to Trinidad and Tobago in June 1967 after a U.S. decision that it no longer was required for hemispheric security. Shortly after Trinidad and Tobago's independence, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) presented a $30-million grant, part of which the country used to construct the John F. Kennedy College of Arts and Sciences on the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies. Instruments of ratification were exchanged in December 1970 for a treaty to avoid double taxation.

In October 1971, the United States turned over to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago its Chaguaramas tracking station, which was operated by the U.S. Air Force. The OMEGA navigational aid station was closed in December 1980. The United States now has no military installations in Trinidad and Tobago.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—Charles A. Gargano
Deputy Chief of Mission—Lacy Wright
Economic Officer—Judson L. Bruns
Political Officer—Gordon Stirling
Regional Commercial Officer—Stephan Helgesen
Consul General—Bruce McKenzie
Public Affairs Officer—Mark A. Glago

The U.S. Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago is located at 15 Queen's Park West, Port-of-Spain, (tel. 62–26371—from the United States, area code 809). ■

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